



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Sydney University Museums

COLLECTIONS GUIDELINES

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Macleay Museum
Nicholson Museum
University Art Gallery

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

1.1.1. Definition

The Sydney University Museums *Collections Guidelines* inform the management, curation, and development of the Sydney University Museums (SUM) collections and details the manner in which museum staff discharge their responsibilities.

1.1.2. Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to articulate the ethics, standards and practices of activities relating to the ownership, management and curation of SUM collections. These activities include the acquisition, deaccession, documentation, preservation and handling, risk management, loan, exhibition and access to collections.

1.1.3. Objectives

The objective of this document is to enable Sydney University Museums to:

- Align its collection management and curatorial activities with international and national professional standards, as outlined by UNESCO, CITES, ICOM, Museums Australia, and the National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries.
- Formalise its collection management activities within the larger framework of University heritage management policies.
- Clarify its responsibility for University of Sydney collections that are not within its accessioned collections or current physical control.
- Communicate its collection management and curatorial standards to University and community partners.

1.1.4. Scope

These guidelines cover the heritage assets of the Sydney University Museums, which include the collections of the Macleay Museum, the Nicholson Museum, and the University Art Gallery.

The University of Sydney Union art collection and the collections of other University departments, except where specifically mentioned, remain outside the scope of these guidelines. Also excluded from the scope of these guidelines are the Fisher Library Rare Book Collection, the University Archives, and architectural non-moveable cultural heritage, which is the responsibility of the University's Heritage Management Committee.

1.1.5. Management Authority

Sydney University Museums (SUM) is an administrative unit of the department of Museums and Cultural Engagement, within the Office of the Provost of the University of Sydney (University). SUM is managed by the Director, Museums and Cultural Engagement (SUM Director). SUM has the authority to manage heritage assets on behalf of the University.

These guidelines have been endorsed by the Director, Museums and Cultural Engagement.

1.2 Sydney University Museums

1.2.1. History of the Organisation

Established in 1850, the University of Sydney is Australia's first university and its foundation mission was to "promote useful knowledge and to encourage the residents of New South Wales to pursue a regular course of liberal education" (*University of Sydney Act of Incorporation 1850*). The University's museums and collections have always been an integral part of this and its continuing mission.

The Sydney University Museums comprise the University Art Gallery, the Nicholson Museum, and the Macleay Museum, three public museums with collections that date to the University's early years. The collections are of considerable historical, cultural, and scientific significance, and have long histories of use within the University and the larger community.

- The collections held by the University Art Gallery began with the foundation of the University itself in 1850. Since then they have grown to include paintings, photography, prints, sculpture, public art and decorative art objects. The collections are displayed throughout the University, with a dedicated gallery space in the University's Quadrangle for temporary exhibitions. The University Art Gallery has strong collaborative relationships with the Department of Art History and Film Studies, Sydney College of the Arts, the Power Institute Foundation for Art and Visual Culture, and the University of Sydney Union art collection.
- The country's oldest university museum, the Nicholson Museum was founded in 1860 by Sir Charles Nicholson, one of the founders of the University. The donation of his personal collection of antiquities to the University formed the basis of a collection that has since expanded to become the largest of its kind in Australia, with material from ancient Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Egypt, the Near and Middle East, and Europe. The Nicholson Museum was formerly managed under the auspices of the Department of Classics and the Department of Archaeology, and maintains close links with departmental research and fieldwork. The Museum has a dedicated exhibition space in the University's Quadrangle.
- The Macleay Museum focuses on natural history, ethnography and history. Assembled over many years by members of the Macleay family, who were at the forefront of entomological and zoological research in the 19th century, the collections were willed to the University in 1887 to promote the study of science and housed in a purpose-built museum building. The collections have since expanded to encompass several branches of natural history, ethnography, historic photography and scientific instruments and apparatus. Located on the top floor of the Macleay Building, the Museum has longstanding research and teaching relationships with the University's science faculty, particularly biological sciences, and with arts and social science departments.

Founded as separate bodies within the University, all three museums were managed independently of one another until amalgamated in 2002 as Sydney University Museums under a single executive structure. This step was taken by the University in an effort to better manage its heritage assets, support related research activities and public programs, centralise marketing and promotion, and share the skills and

experience of specialist staff. SUM collections are now managed centrally, as are associated exhibition, education and public programs.

1.2.2. Professional Role within the University

Sydney University Museums manages, researches and interprets the collections of its three component museums: the Macleay Museum, the Nicholson Museum, and the University Art Gallery.

SUM participates in the University's aims for international standards of learning, teaching, and research, and provides research, education and public access to its collections for University students, staff and the wider community.

SUM is obligated to monitor the care and documentation of all movable cultural material owned by the University.

SUM advises and is available to the wider University of Sydney community to serve as a source of expertise in the management and curation of other University collections.

Since 2008, SUM has maintained a management agreement with the University of Sydney Union (USU) to advise and assist in the management of the USU art collection.

1.2.3. Related Collections

SUM respects the collecting interests of other national and state museums and institutions, as well as other collecting units within the University. SUM staff consult with these bodies where overlapping interests are identified, and refer items to the most appropriate institutions. SUM is committed to building relationships, collaborating and developing research synergies across the sector.

1.3 Mission

1.3.1. SUM Mission Statement

Sydney University Museums participates in the continuing excellence of teaching, learning, research, and community engagement of the University.

Sydney University Museums actively engages in cultural, social, historical, scientific and artistic exploration and debate for the benefit of the University's students, staff and wider communities by providing care, access, research and interpretation of its collections which are of local, national and international significance.

1.3.2. Interpretation of the Mission

The curation and careful management of the collections are one of the key means by which the mission is fulfilled. Sydney University Museums therefore aims to acquire, care for, use, interpret and promote its collections in a manner that is consistent with the intent of its mission. Specifically:

- The collections exist for the benefit of University students and staff, and the wider local, national, and international community.
- The collections will be strategically developed to reflect and support the historic, cultural, and scientific identity of the University.

- The collections will be made accessible to engage visitors through exhibitions, scholarly research, and support of the educational and research mission of the University.

1.4 The Collections

The University of Sydney has one of the largest and finest university collections of antiquities, art, ethnography, history and natural history in Australia. These collections are used for teaching and research, and provide an opportunity for the University to contribute to the cultural life of the nation.

1.4.1. Significance

The University of Sydney has the largest and richest scientific and cultural heritage collections of any university in the nation. With more than 100,000 artefacts and upwards of 600,000 natural history specimens collectively valued in excess of \$120 million, the collections form a significant part of the national heritage.

Known throughout Australia and abroad, the collections are closely linked to the history of the University and to significant periods in research and innovation at the University.

As custodians of these uniquely valuable cultural and scientific collections, SUM is mandated to preserve them so they may be studied and enjoyed by future generations.

1.4.2. Strengths

SUM collections represent a wide range of material related to the University and its teaching and research programs. Holdings include material in the fields of history, natural history, science, ethnography, antiquities and the visual arts. While each of the component museums specialise in particular collection areas, there are significant sections of crossover, including Indigenous Australian cultural items, photography and University heritage.

The visual art collection comprises works by Australian, Asian and European artists, and dates early European times to the present. The collection includes a range of media, including paintings, prints, watercolours, drawings, textiles, photography, decorative arts, sculptures and ceramics. Central to the collection are major examples of Australian art, from landscape and portraiture to modernist works, as well as 19th century European works and Japanese prints.

The antiquities collection is the largest and most prestigious of its kind in Australia. It features material culture from Egypt, Greece, Italy, Cyprus, the Near and Middle East, and Europe, and includes many exceptional artefacts. The Classical material includes a substantial collection of figured pottery, while a significant part of the Cypriot and Near Eastern material comes from the University's own excavations. The Egyptian collection includes important material from the Amarna period and a fine collection of New Kingdom and Late period artefacts, including mummies.

The ethnography collection includes significant material documenting cultural and social life acquired from Indigenous peoples of Australia and the Pacific region during the pre-colonial, colonial and early post-colonial periods. Overall themes incorporate encounters during the age of European exploration, resistance and accommodation in the 20th century, as well as living culture and history. Highlights include the oldest known Northern Australian bark paintings in a public museum, collections made

during a number of early expeditions, along with key images of communities taken by University staff in the early 20th century.

The natural history collection has its origins in the collection of insects begun by Alexander Macleay in the late eighteenth century and brought to Australia upon his appointment as Colonial Secretary for NSW in 1826. It has since developed into an extraordinary natural history collection that encompasses several branches of entomological, vertebrate and invertebrate orders. Highlights include 2,350 holotypes of insect, bird and mammal specimens. Its great strength is the amount of foreign material, unparalleled in Australia by age or comprehensiveness.

The scientific instruments and apparatus collection consists primarily of objects used by University departments – in particular by chemistry, engineering, geosciences, physics and biological sciences, and the Sydney Teachers' College. The collection reflects the history of science at the University, its teaching and research. Microscopy, measuring and calculating instruments and teaching models are collection strengths. A technology collection includes audio-visual equipment, lighting and office equipment and timepieces. There is also a representative collection of historic photographic equipment.

The historic photograph collection comprises photographs documenting life in Australia and the Pacific region, from the 1840s to the 1960s, as captured by both commercial and amateur photographers. It includes a wide range of photographic formats. Photographs related to the work of the University are an important focus, with major holdings being the teaching lantern slide collections of several departments. A representative collection of historic photographic equipment is held in the scientific instruments and apparatus collection.

1.4.3. Purpose

SUM collections are developed, curated and managed as a resource to inspire, educate and inform the University and wider community, and to preserve the University's history and heritage. The main activity falls into the following areas:

- **Research:** The collections inspire and drive research and scholarship, resulting in significant publications and exhibitions. The multi-disciplinary collections attract research grants, cross-institutional collaborations, and the involvement of source communities. SUM aims to display the University's broad research programs and stimulate further research and collection.
- **Teaching and Learning:** The collections are used across the undergraduate and graduate curricula. Faculties, departments and programs that commonly draw on the collections include: Architecture, Visual Arts (Sydney College of the Arts), Art History and Film Studies, Museum Studies, the Power Institute, Archaeology, Classics and Ancient History, Heritage Studies, Social and Biological Anthropology, The Koori Centre, Education, Agriculture, History and Philosophy of Science, Electron Microscope Unit, Biological Sciences, and Veterinary Science.
- **Community Engagement:** SUM attracts more than 95,000 visitors each year through a wide range of public programs including exhibitions, talks, activities, lectures and heritage and education tours. The current schools education program offers curriculum-based learning for students from Kindergarten to Year 12.

1.4.4. Categories

Sydney University Museums is responsible for both collections and collections-related property. Every object or specimen in the SUM collections will be categorised as being part of the permanent collection, the custody collection, or the education collection. Related property is categorised here as unaccessioned assets and the reference library.

- **Permanent Collection:** Includes all objects or specimens that are formally accessioned into the SUM collections. Material in this category is selected for its utility in fulfilling the exhibition, research, and teaching functions of SUM as informed by its Mission Statement. This collection is maintained for permanence and is subject to the highest professional standards regarding its documentation, inventory control, and physical care. Removal from the collection requires formal deaccession per section 3.0.
- **Custody Collection:** Includes ancestral remains and secret / sacred objects that have been deaccessioned from the permanent collections and await identification or claim by Australian Indigenous communities. SUM does not seek to expand this collection, but provides transitional care in accordance with the University's repatriation policy, Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items (1996).
- **Education Collection:** Includes material used to support SUM teaching functions through its hands-on education and public programs, and is largely comprised of duplicate or unprovenanced material deaccessioned from the permanent collections. Considered 'consumable' by virtue of its use, its standard of care is intended to prolong its functional life.
- **Unaccessioned Assets:** Comprises a diverse range of objects and specimens that may or may not qualify for inclusion in the permanent or education collections. In large part, this material comprises a backlog of items transferred from University departments that were not accessioned at the time of receipt. SUM seeks to reduce its holdings of unaccessioned assets through progressive assessment for acquisition, transfer to the most appropriate collecting institution, or sale.
- **Reference Library:** Comprises material, primarily books and journals, which are essential for documentation, research, and interpretation of the collection. The reference library is subject to valuation as a University asset.

1.4.5. Future Directions

SUM's strategy is to develop coherence in the overall collection in consideration of how it is used by and for its constituencies, as well as to focus more closely on how it relates to the broad-ranging work of the University.

Existing collections will be documented more thoroughly and future growth will be governed by an ongoing analysis of the overall collection, its current component divisions, and through thoughtfully deliberated accession and deaccession decisions. Separate development plans for each area of the permanent collection will be written to provide more detailed information about existing collections, articulate thematic threads within and across collections, and further refine collecting priorities (per section 2.4 below).

As part of these efforts, the education collection will be more formally defined and developed to include material appropriate to support a broadened hands-on education program.

Complete inventory control of its collections is a major goal of SUM and is supported by the ongoing stocktaking program stipulated in the University's Heritage Management Policy.

SUM also aims to expand audience access to the collections and associated research via the Internet.

1.5 Ethics

Sydney University Museums aims to conduct activities in relation to its collection in a manner that responds to the highest ethical and professional standards. Specifically:

- 1.5.1. SUM will act within State and Federal law and international agreements between Australia and other countries. All collections related activity will be in accordance with the ICOM Code of Ethics, the UNESCO Convention, the CITES Convention, and the Museums Australia Code of Ethics.
- 1.5.2. In all activities relating to the collections, SUM staff members will act in accordance with the standards of the University of Sydney's Code of Conduct, which covers conflicts of interest, the acceptance of gifts, ownership of intellectual property, outside employment and consulting, personal and professional conduct, public comment, and issues of discretion and confidentiality.
- 1.5.3. In relevant activities relating to collections or exhibition research, SUM staff members will act in accordance with the University of Sydney Research Office established guidelines on animal and human research ethics.
- 1.5.4. Private collecting by staff or other persons employed by or closely connected with SUM is not necessarily a conflict of interest and may enhance expertise. However, no collecting by such persons can in fact or in appearance conflict with the interests of SUM and its collecting programs. In no case should staff compete with SUM in any personal collecting activity or act as or for dealers. SUM must always be given first right of refusal to acquire any object or specimen. Because the possibility of conflict exists, SUM staff will declare all collecting interest to the SUM Director, in accordance with the principles expressed in the University's Code of Conduct.
- 1.5.5. Staff of SUM will not under any circumstance remove or transport collection material to any space outside designated storage areas without correct and authorised associated loan and movement receipts.
- 1.5.6. Collection, curation and management of Australian Indigenous items will be in accordance with the national Museums Australia Indigenous heritage policy, *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities* (2005) and the University's repatriation policy, *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items* (1996).
- 1.5.7. Collection, curation and management of culturally sensitive objects and ancestral remains from outside Australia will be conducted in a manner that appropriately respects and recognises legitimate concerns of people intimately involved with such material, while accommodating the needs of other legitimate users. At all times, attempts will be made to avoid or reconcile conflicts between the University's scientific or educational roles and SUM's role as a responsible custodian of such material.

- 1.5.8. SUM will educate its visitors and stakeholders in regard to the ethical and legal responsibilities of natural and cultural heritage preservation.
- 1.5.9. SUM staff will not provide appraisals for tax deductions or other external purposes, but will assist donors to obtain valuations for tax deduction purposes as part of the Commonwealth's Cultural Gift Program.
- 1.5.10. Identification and authentication will be given only for professional or education purposes under the ethical and legal guidelines laid down by the Museums Australia Code of Ethics.

1.6 Implementation

1.6.1. Responsibilities

The SUM Director is charged by the University with stewardship authority for the collections. The SUM Director reports to the Office of the Provost who has oversight responsibility for SUM.

The SUM Director assigns authority for the execution of the provisions and responsibilities articulated within these guidelines to the incumbents of staff positions with direct responsibilities for collections care, management and oversight. These include curatorial and collections management staff.

SUM relies on the competence of its staff and the advice of outside experts where necessary to implement provisions of these guidelines. All collections management and curatorial staff must be thoroughly familiar with this document. Other staff or volunteers whose work relates to SUM collections should be conversant with its contents. Staff responsibilities specific to each guideline section are outlined therein and detailed in the *SUM Collections Procedures*.

1.6.2. Documentation

Staff working with collections must document activity in accordance with the University's Recordkeeping Policy, the University's Heritage Management Policy and the SPECTRUM Documentation Standard.

1.6.3. Reporting

In accordance with University formal reporting requirements, SUM reports on its collections related activities to:

- Office of the Provost on a regular basis regarding statistics on visitation, teaching use of collections, research enquiries, internship and other student participation, loan activity, and new acquisitions.
- Internal Audit Office on an annual basis with a "Certificate of Verification of Heritage Assets" for all collections within its care.
- Risk Management Office on an annual basis to confirm updated values for correct insurance coverage.

1.6.4. Review

The policies contained within this document were drafted in 2009, although specific components predate this. It is intended to be a document that will be adapted in the future to reflect the growth, expansion, and developing professional practice of SUM.

The SUM *Collections Guidelines* will be reviewed every five years and on an ad hoc basis if required. The next scheduled review is 2015.

1.7 Related Documentation

1.7.1. University References

Archives and Record Management Services. (2000). *University Recordkeeping Policy*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Human Resources Department. (2008). *Code of Conduct*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Macleay Museum. (1996). *Policy and Procedures Concerning the Management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ancestral Remains and Culturally Significant Items*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Planning and Resources Department. (1999). *Heritage Management Policy*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Research Office. (no date). *Ethics (Human Research Ethics and Animal Ethics)*. Sydney: University of Sydney.

Sydney University Museums and University of Sydney Union agreement for management of the University of Sydney Union Art Collection. Memorandum dated 25 March 2008.

1.7.2. External References

International Council of Museums. (2006). *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Paris: ICOM.

International Union for Conservation of Nature. (1975). *Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)*.

McKenna, Gordon and Patsatzi, Efthymia, eds. (2009). *SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard (version 3.2)*. Cambridge, UK: Collections Trust.

Museums Australia. (1999). *Code of Ethics*. Canberra: Museums Australia (national office).

Museums Australia. (2005). *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: Principles and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage*. Canberra: Museums Australia (national office).

National Standards Taskforce. (2008). *National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries (version 1.0)*. Melbourne: Museums Australia (Victoria office).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (1970). *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*. Paris: UNESCO.